

THE LIGHT OF ASIA

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A MUSICAL DRAMA IN FIVE ACTS

Adapted from Sir Edwin Arnold's Poem

BY

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PREFACE

TRUE Art and true Religion are one in their origin—the apprehension of Beauty, or the Divine, as manifested in this World of shape, colour and sound; one also in their purpose, the uplifting and unfolding of the Human Soul. Historically, they appear to have been born together, as every Church, in the glory of her prime, shows us the various Arts gathered round her shrines.

The highest and fullest artistic achievement is undoubtedly what the Greeks called the Drama and what we, in this day of specialization, must call the Musical Drama, since it has become necessary to combine two words to express that which primitively and essentially is one. Strange as it may seem, the Opera* preceded and did not follow the Tragedy and the Symphony, which might well be taken for its parents.

The Drama in its ideal form is the co-operation of all the Arts, plastic and phonetic, to convey as strongly as possible to the Human Understanding some eternal truth clothed in history or myth. We have no proof that this ideal was ever *completely* realized, but there can be little doubt that it is and always has been one of the loftiest pursuits of Mankind. If the musical and plastic realization of

* We give the word Opera its most comprehensive meaning: *i.e.*, any work written for the stage and including music as one of its principal elements.

Aeschylus was actually and in the opinion of his contemporaries on a par with his literary work as handed down to us, that Master must certainly have entered further than any of his followers into the sanctuary of pure dramatic beauty.

After the decline of Greek culture, Dramatic Art became specialized. What our age calls Music, was born as something distinct. And steadily, painfully sometimes, the Divine Art of Pure Sound climbed through the first somewhat clumsy attempts at counterpoint of the Middle-Ages and the Renaissance to the brilliant fugues and sonatas of the Eighteenth Century and the glorious symphonies of the Nineteenth. Similarly, as the different nations of Europe evolved their spoken and written languages, Poetry, dropping the rather primitive melody to which its birth had linked it, soared to a height of subtle, interior beauty, such as the world had probably never known before.

But, in the depth of the human heart there still dwelt the knowledge that Music, Poetry and the Plastic Arts are One ; and the desire to see them once more united found expression in many works, some of which stand out so prominently that they are likely to live for ever.

This is not the place for a critical study of the Lied, the Ballet and the Opera in the last century. All that can be said is that whenever in any of these forms a true Artist has sought to give expression to his own idea of Beauty (and not merely to achieve success) some lasting creation has been brought into the world and the essence of Art has manifested itself.

Alas that the Twentieth century should have brought us to a crisis in the development of Musical

Drama, if not of all the Arts ! The chief characteristic of this crisis is what might be called the preponderance of form over substance ; the belief that technique must be renovated even at the cost of the soul of Art, expression. Eccentricity passes for merit and the chief cry is for modernism.

The present generation is paying dearly for its worship of the Golden Calf, for its excessive dependence on the financial potentates of the hour. An age of exclusive commercialism is necessarily one of spiritual darkness. The feeblest and most absurd productions of art or literature can be forced on a public fed on journalism by authors and managers who have found that inspiration and critical judgment can be replaced by an adequate knowledge of the art of advertisement. The two qualities are seldom united, and generally only the worst comes to the fore ; it is the scum which goes to the top.

What is especially lacking is a strong, true light which will show the gold from the dross. Whence is this light to come ? Instinctively, remembering the origin of Art, we turn to the Churches to save us from the destructive materialism of the Age. But the Churches too have fallen and are falling more and more into disunion, when the desire of Mankind at present is for Unity. One of the Churches *might* inspire by her sense of Oneness, and by means of the cosmic truths symbolically embodied in her dogmas. But the translucent veil through which the Light shone for the seers is becoming more dense and the whole Western world is threatened with darkness.

In the East however a New Light is dawning ; a New Ray from the One Light that always has been and always will be, if we could but open our hearts to search. The most striking event in the spiritual

life of the Nineteenth century has undoubtedly been the discovery by Europeans of a key to the Oriental languages of the past. An unexplored world of thought lies open to the Western mind. At first partly destructive in its results, because a critical study of the sources of Christianity has led many to deny facts of which they were unable to grasp the true mystical meaning, the new knowledge is now beginning to work constructively. Instead of narrow or obsolete religions, it gives to the Western World a new creed, purely Catholic in the true sense of the word with its fundamental belief in the One Spiritual Life of Mankind of which the Historical Religions are but temporary manifestations, the mortal branches of the One Eternal Tree.

It is from the Sap of the Tree, from the One undying spiritual stream that we can draw renewed faith to enable us to regenerate Art, to bring it back to its true sources, without discarding any of the conquests of the last century, to revive the pure, simple spirit of the Mystery Play, whilst using the more varied modes of expression of our own time.

Edwin Arnold's magnificent translations of the inspired poems of the East proved a profound revelation to the Western World. His *Light of Asia*, published in 1878, was both a surprise and a delight to contemporary thought, and it is in a spirit of great reverence and gratitude that I have ventured to take this masterpiece as subject-matter and, as far as possible, as text for a musical drama ; fully aware of the great difficulty of such an adaptation, yet conscious that my efforts, whether crowned or not with success in the ordinary sense of the word,

can but be recognized as a step in the right direction by those who believe in the resurrection of modern drama by a return to its spiritual source. My principal aim has been to convey knowledge, not to impress the world with an original creation. The Buddhist artists, in the age of faith, often represented the principal episodes (mythical rather than historical) of the Master's life in frescoes and other paintings, and I have had access to a number of these. Following their method, I have tried to draw a series of dramatic pictures, rather than to write a drama in the ordinary sense of the word. The text, I had to make as short as possible, since music adds to the length. Therefore, when reproducing dialogue from the original, a great deal had to be omitted, much to my regret as I am fully aware of the great beauty of the whole original text.

Very little of Gautama's sublime teaching has found place in this drama, and the spectator or reader will perhaps wonder what is this "Treasure," this "Truth" that is now and then referred to, and to what extent the Buddha accomplishes in the drama that which he sets out to do in the Prelude. In my opinion, religious or philosophic teaching is liable to appear tedious, when expounded from the stage. Dramatic art deals with characters and deeds more willingly than with dogmas or beliefs. Buddha's fundamental ideas :

1° The Unity of all Life, with the great duty of Love that ensues.

2° Karma, or individual moral responsibility in a Universe ruled by One Eternal Law

Which meteth good for good and ill for ill,

Making all futures fruits of all the pasts

are presented in the 4th and 5th Acts, and should appear as the natural outcome of the hero's character, as shown in the previous acts—lofty and kind, meditative yet subject to the most generous impulses. In the original *Light of Asia*, Buddha's message to the World is embodied in a speech delivered to his father Suddhâdana (Book the Eighth) ; a pure gem of mystic and poetic beauty, so complete in itself, that it would have nothing whatever to gain and possibly much to lose by the adjunction of music and the stage. I have, however, sought to give to some of the principal teachings of the Buddhist creed (Nirvana, Pain, the Wheel) a symbolic expression through music—particularly in the wordless, symphonic Prelude, where no impressions from the visible world can hamper the Soul in its journey through the realms of mystery.*

F. B.

Paris, January 1922.

* Help of the most valuable kind has been given me from various quarters during the conception and composition of this work, and I wish to pay the tribute of gratitude due to those who have so kindly and so willingly assisted me in my task. The Directors of the Musée Guimet, MM. Goloubew and Hackin have shown and interpreted their many symbolical pictures and statues, thanks to which more than one scene has taken shape in my mind. A great Indian thinker, Inayat Khan—musician, poet, and mystic—has opened to me the invaluable treasure-house of his knowledge, while his brother, Maheboob Khan—a composer of great ability and promise—has given me, in the writing of the West, some of the most striking musical elements of Indian Folklore. I am also indebted to Miss A. Geraeus for much kind advice and assistance from the literary and linguistic point of view.

THE LIGHT OF ASIA

DRAMATIS PERSONÆ :

SIDDARTHA, Prince of the Sakyas and Founder of
Buddhism (*known to history as The Buddha or
Sakya-Muni*)

CHANNA, charioteer and companion to Siddhartha

A PLAGUE-STRICKEN MAN

A BRAHMAN

A YOGI

A HERDSMAN

KING BIMBISARA

MARA, Prince of Darkness

YASODHARA, wife to SIDDARTHA

CHITRA, attendant to YASODHARA

FIRST WOMAN

SECOND WOMAN

THE FALSE YASODHARA

THE DEVAS (*Invisible Chorus*)

THE NAUTCH-GIRLS

THE MOURNERS

A CROWD

THE VOICES OF THE FOREST (*Invisible Chorus*)

Peasants (men and women), Children, Soldiers ;
The Yogis, the Herdsmen, King Bimbisara's Guard,
A Shudra (man of low caste) ;
The Three Daughters of Mara, and other Evil
Spirits, or Devils.

THE LIGHT OF ASIA

PRELUDE

The Buddha, having in former lives won his release from the Wheel of Rebirth, is merged in Nirvana's perfect bliss.

The mournful cry of Life, bound to the Wheel and vainly striving for deliverance, reaches His ear and fills His loving heart with pity.

Of His own free will, He decides to undergo once more, for the sake of all, the agony of physical life, that all Flesh may be shown the Path that leads to Salvation. He descends through the higher and the lower planes, and is born on Earth as SIDDHARTHA, Prince of the SAKYAS.

THE LIGHT OF ASIA

ACT I

The Voice of the Silence

Prince Siddartha's Pleasure House, Wishramvan. A meal is spread on a terrace, facing the Himalaya Mountains, which are visible in the distance. The Girls of the Pleasure House, gorgeously dressed and covered with jewels, surround Siddartha, who takes no heed of them, nor of the food that is offered him. He gazes fixedly at the mountains and seems lost in a dream. Weird music is heard from a vina, on which lingers the evening breeze.

SIDDARTHA. O snowy whiteness of the mountain peaks !
For ever do you last, while all we love,
While all those flitting shadows we call life
As yonder flowers pass and fade away !

THE DEVAS (*invisible chorus, very faint from above*).
We are the voices of the wandering wind
Which moan for rest, and rest can never find ;
Lo ! as the wind is, so is mortal life,
A moan, a sigh, a sob, a storm, a strife.

YASODHARA. How strange the stringèd gourd
doth sound this eve,
As if the wail of the wind were a voice,
A voice from beyond, from the world of dreams.

THE DEVAS. Wherefore and whence we are ye
cannot know,
Nor where Life springs, nor whither Life doth go ;
But Thou that art to save, Thine hour is nigh !
The sad world waiteth in its misery.

SIDDARTHA (*rising*). My world ! . . . Oh !
World ! I hear, I know, I come !

THE DEVAS. So sigh we, passing o'er the silver
strings,
To Thee who know'st not yet of earthly things.
The blind world stumbleth on its round of pain !
Rise, Maya's child ! wake ! slumber not again !

YASODHARA. What ails Siddartha that his heart
doth sigh
As if some sorrow deep, some secret woe
Were his ? Hath not my Lord comfort in me ?

SIDDARTHA. Such comfort, Love, such rapture
that my soul
Aches, thinking it must end ; for it will end. . .
Nay, though we locked up love and life with lips
So close that night and day our breaths grew one,
Time would thrust in between, to steal away
My passion and thy grace.

YASODHARA. Was that thy dream ?
Wilt thou not leave the future to itself ?
(*She puts her arm round his neck*)
And if this night is ours, what wilt thou more ?
Nautch-girls, show us some new dance, some rhythm
That will draw the Prince's soul to earth.
(*The dance begins*)
Thou, Chitra, tell us some strange fairy tale.

CHITRA.

There was a fairy king
And there was a fairy queen,
Who lived happy in the land
Where eternal spring dwells.

THE NAUTCH-GIRLS (*singing to the rhythm of their
dance*).

Fair goes the dancing when the sitar's tuned,
Tune us the sitar neither high nor low !

CHITRA.

One day he went a'hunting
On his snowy white steed
'Cross woodland and 'cross marshland
To catch the Jam-ju bird.

THE NAUTCH-GIRLS. Tune us the sitar neither
low nor high,
And we will dance away the hearts of men !

CHITRA.

His love has been untrue
And he tries to forget,
So he gallops, he gallops,
On his snowy white steed.

THE NAUTCH-GIRLS. And we will dance away
the hearts of men.
The string o'er-stretched breaks, and music flies.

CHITRA.

He reaches a country
Where pale-fac'd people dwell,
And where the crimson sun
Sets in the sapphire sea.

THE NAUTCH-GIRLS. The string o'er-stretched
breaks, and music flies :
The string o'er slack is dumb, and music dies.

CHITRA.

To the land of oblivion
No nearer can he reach,
Though he gallops, he gallops
Around the wide, wide world.

THE NAUTCH-GIRLS. The string o'er-slack is
dumb, and music dies.
Tune us the sitar neither high nor low !

CHITRA.

And when the wind is weeping
And the sad surf is sighing,
I hear, far, far away
The fairy-kings lament.

THE NAUTCH-GIRLS. Fair goes the dancing,
when the sitar's tuned.
Tune us the sitar neither high nor low.

CHITRA.

And the distant hail-storm's
Patter, patter on the pane,
T'is the gallop, t'is the gallop
Of the snowy-white steed.

SIDDARTHA (*to Chitra*).

Thy weird tale, O Chitra, brings me back
The wind's song in the strings with all its grace.

(*to Yasodhara*)

Give her, Yasodhara, thy pearl for thanks.

(to himself)

Oft times I marvel, as the Lord of day
Treads from the east his kingly road of gold,
Who first on the world's edge hath hailed his beam ?
Sore have I panted, at the sun's decline,
To pass with him into that crimson west
And see the peoples of the evening !

(to Chitra)

O Chitra ! you that know of fairy land,
Tell me what lies beyond our brazen gates.

CHITRA.

The city first, fair Prince, and then the fields,
The temples and the gardens and the groves,
And next King Bimbisara's realm, and then
The vast flat world with multitudes of folk.

SIDDARTHA. Tell Channa that I want my
chariot yoked.

At noon to-morrow I will pass the gates.

(Chitra walks a few steps towards the door, then stops
to hear what Yasodhara has to say).

YASODHARA. What ails my Lord that he doth
want to see

The wide flat world beyond the palace grounds ?
Hath he not all for which his heart can yearn ?
Beware, I feel that naught but grief will come
From disobedience to thy father's will,
Who in his kingly wisdom sought thy good.
My heart, so full of love for thee, feels faint.
Remain, Siddartha, do not leave me ; stay.

SIDDARTHA. Fain would I know the people and
the streets,
And lives which those men live who are not kings.

YASODHARA (*weeping*). Stay! Let my love
beseech thee, gentle Lord! . . .
(*She tries to embrace him. He kisses her, then gently
pushes her aside.*)

SIDDARTHA. Fair Queen, why shouldst thou
weep if for an hour
I want to see the realm that will be mine . . .
(*to Chitra*)

Bid Channa come with me. We go afoot,
I, as a merchant clad; he, as my clerk.
(*exit Chitra*)

Thus, unknown and unheeded, I will see
The World that lies beyond our brazen gates!
(*Exit SIDDARTHA. YASODHARA glances at him sadly
until he reaches the door. She then falls prostrate on
a sofa. The Girls of the Pleasure House rush up
from all sides.*)

THE DEVAS. We are the voices of the wandering
wind
Which moan for rest, and rest can never find!
Lo! as the wind is, so is mortal life,
A moan, a sigh, a sob, a storm, a strife.

End of Act I.

ACT II

The End that comes to all

A country district on the outskirts of Kapilavastu, near the Gunga river, late in the afternoon. A road crosses the stage. A little of the river is seen on the right-hand side. Near it, a wooden pile. A narrow path leads from the main road to the pile. The Himalaya Mountains are seen in the background.

Peasants (men and women), Soldiers, Merchants, Children pass from time to time, following the road.

FIRST WOMAN. They say the Prince visits our town to-day,
But in some strange disguise, that none may know.

SECOND WOMAN. Perhaps ! But who could fail
his face to recognise ?
His loving face they say is like a God's !

(Enter Siddartha as a merchant, and Channa as his clerk).

Is it not true, fair sir ?

SIDDARTHA *(smiling)*. How could I tell ?
I am not from this land, but from beyond,
(He points towards the mountains)
Whence I have come to bring you some new goods
Some treasures, such as none have ever seen.

FIRST WOMAN (*smiling*). Such treasures then
are not for us poor folk !

SECOND WOMAN. Come, let us to our work.
(*exeunt*)

CHANNA. How well my lord
Doth play his part !

SIDDARTHA. An easy part to play
(*Aside*) For may be there is truth in what I said !
What joy to tread unheeded the high road
And, unobserved, to sympathize with life.
Sweet are my sisters here, that toil and tend,
And light and kind these men that are not kings.

VOICE OF A PLAGUE-STRICKEN MAN. Help,
Masters ! lift me to my feet ; oh help !
Or I shall die before I reach my house !
(*SIDDARTHA crosses the road to where the voice
sounds from. THE PLAGUE-STRICKEN MAN creeps
on to the road, moaning all the while*).

THE PLAGUE-STRICKEN MAN. Ah ! the pain !
. . . Good People, help ! Ah ! the pain !
(*He falls headlong upon the ground. SIDDARTHA
crouches near him, and rests the man's head upon his
knee*).

SIDDARTHA. Say, Brother, what is ill with thee ?
what harm
Hath fallen ? wherefore canst thou not arise ?

(to Channa)

Why is it, Channa, that he pants and moans
And gasps to speak, and sighs so pitiful?

CHANNA. Great Prince! this man is smitten
with some pest;

His elements are all confounded. Lo!

His heart now like an ill-played drum-skin beats;
His blood, which ran a wholesome river, boils!

This is a sick man with the fit upon him.

See how he plucks and plucks to seize his grief
And rolls his bloodshot orbs, and grinds his teeth,
And draws his breath as if 'twere choking smoke!

Oh! Sir! it is not good to hold him so!

The harm may pass and strike thee, even thee.

SIDDARTHA (*still comforting the man*).

And are there others, are there many thus,
And might it be with me as now with him?

CHANNA. Great Lord! this comes in many
forms to all.

SIDDARTHA. Come such ills unobserved?

CHANNA. Like the sly snake
That stings unseen.

SIDDARTHA. Then all men live in fear?

CHANNA. So live they, Prince!

SIDDARTHA. And none can say: I sleep
Happy and whole to-night, and so shall wake?

CHANNA. None say it.

SIDDARTHA (*showing THE PLAGUE-STRICKEN MAN
to Channa*).

And the end of many aches
Is this, a broken body and sad mind,
Or else old age ?

CHANNA. Yea, if men last so long.

SIDDARTHA. But if they cannot bear their
agonies ?
Or if they will not bear, and seek a term ?

CHANNA. They die, Prince.

SIDDARTHA. Die ?

CHANNA. Yea, at the last comes Death !
Some few grow old, most suffer and fall sick,
But all must die !

(THE PLAGUE-STRICKEN MAN *gasps and dies*).

Behold, there comes the dead !

(Enter a funeral convoy. Foremost is a Brahman swinging an earthen bowl filled with lighted coals ; behind him, the Kinsmen, shorn, ungirt, with mourning marks. Next, the bier made of four poles, interwoven with bamboos, bearing the Dead feet foremost, lean, sprinkled with red and yellow dust. Then, Women Mourners, with hair undone, and a Man holding the freshly-cut branch of a tree).

THE MOURNERS (*men and women*). *Ram bolo
bhai ram ! Ram bolo bhai ram !

Ram bolo bhai ram !

**Ram nama satya hai, Sab a satya hai (bis).

THE BRAHMAN. Tell us, O Death, what we so
long to know
About the great departure ! Does it lead,
As some have said, to utter nothingness ?
Or to some mode of being we cannot grasp ?

THE MOURNERS. Ram bolo bhai ram ! Ram
bolo bhai ram ! etc.

THE BRAHMAN. Life, in its various phases doth
destroy,
O Death, what was our vigour and our joy,
The quickness of the eye and of the brain ;
And what is left is not of much avail !

THE MOURNERS. Ram bolo bhai ram ! Ram
bolo bhai ram ! etc.

THE BRAHMAN. He hath the threefold mark of
sacrifice
Who, in his life, fulfilled the threefold work !
Such safely cross the World of Birth and Death,
And enter into that which has no end !

THE MOURNERS. Ram bolo bhai ram ! Ram
bolo bhai ram ! etc.

(The Bearers now enter the path, turning the Dead
Man head first).

* Call upon Rama, brothers !

** The name of Rama is the only truth,
All other is untruth !

THE BRAHMAN. Go, Brother ! Follow thou the
ancient paths
Whither the elders of our race have led !
Yama and Varuna, give him welcome
At the banquet of the souls departed !

THE MOURNERS. Ram bolo bhai ram ! Ram
bolo bhai ram ! etc.
(*The Man bearing the branch wipes the footprints
off the road.*)

THE BRAHMAN. Disperse, O Fiends, and slip
away from hence !
For him the fathers built this wooden pile.

THE MOURNERS. Disperse, O Fiends, and slip
away from hence !

THE BRAHMAN. May Yama grant him rest for
evermore
In the fair land where a fresh river flows !

THE MOURNERS. May Yama grant him rest for
evermore !
(During this last strophe, the Bearers have placed
the Dead Man on the pile).

THE BRAHMAN (*lighting the pile from the bowl and
addressing the fire*).
Of this man, Agni, art Thou born. May he
Be born again of Thee to a New Life !

THE MOURNERS (*to the fire*).
May he be born again to a New Life !
(The flames spread and catch the whole pile)

THE BRAHMAN (*to the Dead Man who is still visible,
but is being licked by the flames*).

Go the right way ! From Mara's fiends escape,
And reach thy fathers' heavenly abode !

THE MOURNERS. Go the right way ! From
Mara's fiends escape !

THE BRAHMAN. To the fathers united, to Yama,
Bearing the merits of thy sacrifice !

THE MOURNERS. To the fathers united, to Yama.

THE BRAHMAN. Behind thee leave all earthly
frailty ! Go !
Safely return to thy true home of light !

THE MOURNERS. Safely return to thy true
home of light !
(The Dead Man disappears in the flames).

SIDDARTHA (*who all the while has been watching with
eyes filled with tears, to Channa*)
Is this the end that comes to all who live ?

CHANNA. This is, great Sir, the end that comes
to all !

THE BRAHMAN. Call upon Rama, brothers !
Rama, hear !

THE MOURNERS. Ram bolo bhai ram ! Ram
bolo bhai ram !
Ram bolo bhai ram !

End of Act II.

ACT III

The Hour has come

A summer night at Wishramvan. The nuptial chamber. A window. On the narrow patch of dark blue sky a few stars are seen. On a couch of silver-white silk Siddartha and Yasodhara are sleeping. A small lamp sheds a few dull rays of yellowish light. The rest of the room is wrapped in the utmost darkness. Siddartha is absolutely motionless ; but Yasodhara is restless, and shifts from one side to the other in her sleep, as if possessed by some awful nightmare.

THE DEVAS (*very faint, from above*).

We are the voices of the wandering wind
Which moan for rest and rest can never find !
We are as ye are, ghosts from the inane ;
What pleasure have we of our changeful pain ?

What pleasure hast thou of thy changeless bliss ?
Nay, if Love lasted, there were joy in this.
The sad world waiteth in its misery,
And Thou that art to save, thine hour is nigh.

YASODHARA (*in her sleep*). Thine hour is nigh,
thine hour is nigh, thine hour . . .

(*awakes*)

What have I heard, what have I seen, O Gods !
(*kisses Siddartha's hand*)

My Lord, give me the comfort of thy speech !
Awake !

SIDDARTHA (*waking*). What is with thee, Love of
my heart ?

YASODHARA. Alas, Siddartha dear, I sank to
sleep

Most happy, for the babe I bear of thee
Quickened this eve, and at my heart there beat
That double pulse of life, and joy, and love
Whose happy music lulled me ; but—aho !—
In slumber I beheld three sights of dread.

I saw a white bull with the wide-branching horns,
Bearing upon his front a gem which shone
As if some star had dropped to glitter there !
Slow through the streets towards the gates he paced,

And none could stay him, though there came a
Voice

From Indra's temple : " If ye stay him not,
The glory of the country goeth forth ! "
Yet none could stay him. Then I wept aloud,

And locked my arms about his neck, and strove,
And bade them bar the gates ; but that ox-king
Broke from my clasp, and, bursting through the
bars,
Trampled the warders down and passed away.

SIDDARTHA. All this, O my Princess, was good
to see !

YASODHARA. The next strange dream was this :

Four Presences

Splendid, with shining eyes, so beautiful
They seemed the Regents of the Earth who dwell
On Mount Sumeru, lighted from the sky.

Swift swept they on our city, where I saw
The golden flag of Indra on the gate
Flutter and fall ; and lo ! there rose instead
A glorious banner, all the folds whereof

Rippled with flashing fire of rubies sewn
So that all flesh might see ; and wondrous blooms,
Plucked in what clime I know not, fell in showers,
Coloured as none are coloured in our groves !

SIDDARTHA. All this, my Lotus-Flower, was
good to see.

YASODHARA. Save that it ended with a Voice of
fear
Crying, " The Time is nigh ! The Time is nigh ! "

Thereat the third dream came : for when I sought
Thy side, sweet Lord, ah ! on our bed there lay
An unpressed pillow and an empty robe ;
Nothing of thee but those, nothing of thee !
And, sleeping still, I rose, and sleeping saw
Thy belt of pearls, tied here below my breasts,
Change to a stinging snake ; my ankle-rings
Fall off ; my golden bangles part and fall !
While this, our bridal couch, sank to the ground,
And something rent the crimson purdah down.
Then far away I heard the white bull low,
And once again that cry, " The time is come ! "

I woke ! O Prince ! what may such visions mean ?

SIDDARTHA (*sadly*). Comfort thee, my Princess,
if comfort lives
In changeless love ! For, though thy dreams may
be
Shadows of things to come, and though the world
Stands near, perchance, to know some way of help,

Yet, whatsoever fall to thee and me,
Be sure I loved and love Yasodhara.
Thou knowest how I muse these many moons
Seeking to save the sad Earth I have seen.

But, if my soul yearns sore for souls unknown,
Judge how my high-winged thoughts must hover
here !
Always I loved and always love thee well,
And what I sought for all sought most for thee !

But thou, my Love, take comfort. There may be
A way to peace on earth by woes of ours !

YASODHARA. That means my dreams were true,
and thou wilt go
Who art my life and light, my king, my world !
(*throwing both her arms around his neck*)
No, thou wilt stay, pray let my love beseech thee !
Or else my heart will break, my heart that beats
For thee, and thee alone, Siddartha dear !

SIDDARTHA. Know, Yasodhara, that I loved
thee most
Because I loved so much all living souls !
Now, Princess, rest ; for I will rise and watch.

(SIDDARTHA gazes lovingly at YASODHARA who gradually falls asleep. The Moon rises and sheds its silver-blue rays in the nuptial chamber. SIDDARTHA takes a few steps towards the window).

THE DEVAS. The time has come ! This is the night ; choose thou

The way of greatness or the way of good,
To reign a King of Kings or wander lone,
Crownless and homeless, that the world be saved !

YASODHARA (*in her sleep*). This is the night !
The time . . . the time has come !

(SIDDARTHA glances at her sadly, then looks at the sky. The Moon is now plainly visible and shines by the Crab).

SIDDARTHA (*to the stars*). Oh summoning Stars !

I come ! Oh mournful Earth !

For thee and thine I lay aside my youth,
My golden days, my nights,

(Glancing once more at YASODHARA, who is now lit up by the Moon)

thine arms, sweet Queen,

Harder to put aside than all the rest !

This will I do, because the woful cry
Of Life and all flesh living cometh up
Into my ears, and all my soul is full
Of pity for the sickness of this world,
Which I will heal if healing may be found.

(He walks round the couch, then takes a few steps towards the *purdah*, but comes back again, as if unable yet to abandon his love).

THE DEVAS. We are the voices of the wandering
wind ;
Wander thou too, O Prince, thy rest to find ;
Leave love for love of lovers ; for woe's sake
Quit state for sorrow, and deliverance make.

SIDDARTHA. Press heavy, Night, upon her
down-dropped lids !
(*Exit*).

End of Act III.

ACT IV

Thou shalt not kill

A shrine in the wilderness, in King Bimbisara's realm. Springtime. Palm-trees ; flowers in full bloom. The altar is on the right-hand side of the stage. A path, from the left, passes behind some shrubs in the middle, and out on the right (back) Another path, from the right, leads to the altar A third path, from the left, joins up with the first behind the shrubs in the middle of the stage. In the background an upward slope of country with rocks and caverns. On the main path Siddartha, hair shorn, wearing a plain yellow robe, is engaged in a discussion with some self-tortured and self-mutilated Yogis.

A YOGI. Only Great Brahm endures ; the Gods but live.

SIDDARTHA. Then why, if you are holy, being wise,

Dismantle and dismember this fair house
Where we have come to dwell by painful pasts ;
Whose windows give us light, the little light
Whereby we gaze abroad to know if dawn
Will break, and whither winds the better way ?

YOGI. This have we chosen, Gāutama*, for road
And tread it to the close, in trust, of death.
Peace go with thee !

(Exeunt Yogis towards the right by the main path.)

SIDDARTHA *(to the flowers)*. Oh, flowerets of the
field !

Who turn your tender faces to the sun,
Glad of the light, and grateful with sweet breath
Of fragrance and these robes of reverence donned,
Silver and gold and purple—none of ye

Miss perfect living, none of ye despoil
Your happy beauty ! Oh, ye palms ! which rise
Eager to pierce the sky and drink the wind !
What secret know ye that ye grow content ?

Ye too, who dwell so merry in the trees—
Quick-darting parrots, bee-birds, bulbuls, doves—
None of ye hate your life, none of ye deem
To strain to better by foregoing needs !

But man, who slays ye—being lord—is wise,
And wisdom, nursed on blood, cometh thus forth
In self-tormentings !

(A flock of white goats and a flock of black sheep are driven across the stage from the left. Last of the flock strolls a small lamb which cannot keep pace with the rest. Its mother lingers for fear of losing it. SIDDARTHA picks up the lamb and puts it on his neck. The ewe remains near him.)

* Gautama : Name which, according to a custom of the times, the Sakyas had borrowed from an old family of Vedic poets, and under which the Founder of Buddhism was known to the world during and after the years of His quest.

SIDDARTHA (*to the ewe*). Poor woolly mother !
Whither thou goest, I will bear thy care.
'Twere all as good to ease one beast of grief
As sit and watch the sorrows of the world
In yonder caverns with the priests who pray.

(*To the Herdsmen*)

Why, friends, drive ye the flocks under high noon,
Since 'tis at evening that men fold their sheep ?

A HERDSMAN. By great King Bimbisara we are
sent
To fetch a sacrifice of goats five-score
And five-score sheep, the which our Lord the King
Slayeth this night in worship of his Gods.

SIDDARTHA. I follow ye ; please take me to the
King !

(*Exeunt Herdsmen, followed by Siddartha with lamb on his shoulders. Enter Crowd from all directions. Enter by path leading to altar, a Brahman followed by the Shudra who assists him in the sacrifice*. The Brahman lights a fire on the altar, while the Shudra sharpens the knife which is to slay the victims.*)

THE MEN. Five-score white goats, five-score
black sheep, our King
Slayeth this night in worship of his Gods.

THE WOMEN. Who is it brings the sacrifice to-
day
So graceful and peace-giving as he goes ?
What is his caste ? Whence hath he eyes so sweet ?
Can he be Sakra or the Devuraj ?

* As he may not spill blood with his own hands,

THE MEN. Is it not Gautama, the holy man,
Who dwelleth with the Rishis on the hill?

ALL. The King! Here comes our King, our
noble King!

*(Enter Guard. They make room for King Bimbisara,
who follows and stands in front of the altar, sur-
rounded by his Courtiers.)*

HERDSMAN *(entering)*. Great King whom the
Gods love, there cometh here
A holy hermit, bringing down the flock
Which thou didst bid to crown thy sacrifice.

*(Siddartha enters. He is surrounded by a few sheep
and goats, and seems lost in a dream.)*

SIDDARTHA *(aside)*. Alas! Alas! for all my
sheep which have
No shepherd; wandering in the night with none
To guide them; bleating blindly towards the knife
Of Death, as these dumb beasts, which are their kin!
(The Brahman seizes a goat and ties its legs.)

BIMBISARA *(to SIDDARTHA)*. Holy hermit, whom
the Gods have sent me
In this hour of offering, of prayer,
Stand by me, whilst the victims' blood doth flow!

*(The Brahman pours soma juice on the fire, which
flickers up. Meanwhile the Shudra places the victim
on the altar and seizes the knife of sacrifice.)*

THE BRAHMAN. O Brahma, Vishnu, Siva !

This, dread Gods,
Of many yajnas cometh as the crown
From Bimbisara : take ye joy to see
The spirted blood, and pleasure in the scent
Of rich flesh roasting, 'mid the fragrant flames !
Let the King's sins be laid upon this goat
And let the fire consume them, burning it !

(to the Shudra)

Now, Shudra, strike !

SIDDARTHA (*rushing forward and seizing the Shudra's arm*). No, Brother, wait awhile.

THE CROWD. Great Gods ! what shame ! arrest the sacrilege !

SIDDARTHA (*to BIMBISARA*). Let him not strike, great King, let him not strike !

THE CROWD. Justice we claim, great King ! justice we claim !

(*The Shudra, in his surprise, has dropped the knife, and does not pick it up. Siddartha, heedless of what surrounds him, releases the victim's bonds. The Guard advance to arrest him, but awed by the godlike look on his face, stop within a few feet of him, not knowing what to do.*)

BIMBISARA (*to the Crowd*). Yes, justice you shall have !

(*To SIDDARTHA, sternly*)

Now, stranger, speak !
Say wherefore thou hast come thus to upset

The customs of this land. Guards, leave him free !

(*aside*)

In my heart, a Voice for him hath spoken.

SIDDARTHA. Why doth man pray for mercy to
the Gods

When, merciless, being as God to these,
He sheds the blood of those who, having paid
Meek tribute of the milk and wool, have set

Fast trust upon the hands which murder them ?
Teach not our holy books that some do sink
At death, to bird or beast ; or that these rise
To ' man, in wanderings of the Spark divine

Which grows to purged Flame ? You cannot lay
Upon the brow of innocent bound beasts
One hair's weight of that Answer all must give
For all things done amiss or wrongfully !

Alone, each for himself, reckoning with that,
The fixed arithmic of the Universe,
Which meteth good for good and ill for ill,
Making all futures fruits of all the pasts !

How fair this earth were, if all living things
Were linked in friendliness and common use
Of foods, bloodless and pure : the golden grain,
The water fresh, sweet herbs that grow for all !

(*While SIDDARTHA delivers this speech, the Brahman
scatters the embers on the altar, and buries the knife.
King Bimbisara bows deeply before Siddartha ; the
Brahman blesses him and all the Crowd fall with
their faces to the ground.*)

THE BRAHMAN (*to SIDDARTHA*). O Great One,
whom the Gods have sent us, lo !
Once more their Light upon our land doth shine !

BIMBISARA (*to the Crowd*). There hath been
slaughter for the sacrifice
And slaying for the meat, but henceforth none
Shall spill the blood of life or taste of flesh,
Seeing that knowledge grows, and Life is One
And mercy cometh to the merciful !

End of Act IV.

ACT V

The Dawn the Ages waited for

A Forest. On the left side of the stage, a gigantic Fig-tree (henceforth to be known as the Bodhi tree.) SIDDARTHA is seated at the foot of the tree, perfectly still, with legs crossed and hands clasped. He is lost in deep thought. Twilight.

VOICES OF THE FOREST (*invisible chorus from below*).
Lover and Saviour ! 'Thou who hast subdued
Angers and prides, desires and fears, and doubts,
Thou that for each and all hast given Thyself,
This is the Night the ages waited for !

O Lord and Friend, the sad world blesseth Thee
Who art the Buddh* that shall assuage her woes !
Pass, Hailed and Honoured ! strive Thy last for us !
King and high Conqueror ! Thine hour is come !

(The night has now completely fallen. The moon rises. Mara, Prince of Darkness, appears. He is white and naked except for dazzling gems, of which he wears a profusion. In the middle of his forehead, shines a flashing jewel. He bears a golden bow and has the demeanour of a king.)

* Buddh (for Buddha) : He who hath awakened ; He who knoweth. Not originally a name, but a title or dignity assumed by Gautama and referring to His complete victory over illusion, and His discovery of the Truth that saves.

MARA. O Powers of the Night, Powers of Death,
O Fiends that war with Wisdom and with Light,
He who would find the Truth and save the World
Sits under yonder tree ! Obey me, come !

(MARA *raises his bow. Thunder and lightning.*)
Legions of devils of every shape and colour pour in
from all sides. With the most awful noises, they
run up to Siddartha, dance around his tree and
throw various missiles at him. Siddartha heeds
them not. They gradually fall away, discouraged.
The storm decreases ; but, now and again, a
distant peal of thunder is heard.)

MARA (*to SIDDARTHA*). Siddartha, know'st thou
not all things are shows
And vain the knowledge of their vanity ?
Thou dost but chase the shadow of thyself ;
Rise and go hence, there is no better way !

SIDDARTHA. Thou Foe of Life, thou hast no part
with me !

MARA (*raising his bow*). O Daughters fair, sweet
Daughters whom I love,
Come ! let your beauty win more than my wit !

(MARA'S *three Daughters appear : beautiful, nude,
in the full bloom of youth. They begin a lascivious
dance, in which they draw nearer and nearer to
SIDDARTHA, until they are within a few feet of him.
Meanwhile, other young and beautiful Women pour
in from every side, and the forest is lit up by a strange,
infernal light.*)

A MUSICAL DRAMA

41

WOMEN'S CHORUS.

Is there aught dearer in the three wide worlds
Than are the yielded, fragrant breasts of youth ?
This is the Heaven where mortals are like gods,
Makers and Masters, this the gift of gifts

Ever renewed and worth a thousand woes.
For who hath grieved when soft arms shut him safe,
And all life melted to a happy sigh,
When all the world was given in one warm kiss ?

Have us, O Great SIDDARTHA, we are thine
Awaiting thy leisure, night after night,
For ever and ever, in dreamland fair !
Taste of our mouths, and see if youth is sweet !

*(SIDDARTHA, lost in deep thought, takes no heed.
Mara once more raises his bow. A mist appears,
swallowing up the Women and the whole landscape,
with the exception of the Bodhi tree, which remains
plainly visible in the moonlight, with Siddartha still
seated in the same position).*

THE NAUTCH-GIRLS *(invisible, from the mist)*.
Fair goes the dancing when the sitar's tuned.
Tune us the sitar neither low nor high,
And we will dance away the hearts of men !

*(WISHRAMVAN appears, dimly, in the mist, with the
NAUTCH-GIRLS, who continue their song.)*

The string o'erstretched breaks, and music flies.
The string o'erslack is dumb and music dies.
Tune us the sitar neither high nor low !

SIDDARTHA. O fair Companions of my golden youth,
Ye too I save if I can save this World !

(A Spirit, wearing the guise of YASODHARA, emerges from the mist.)

THE FALSE YASODHARA.

Siddartha, Prince ! I die for lack of thee
What heaven hast thou found like that we knew
By bright Rohini in the Pleasure-house,
Where all these weary years I weep for thee ?
Return, Siddartha ! Ah ! return ! But touch
My lips again, but let me to thy breast
Once, and these fruitless dreams will end ! Oh
look !

Am I not thy Princess, thy Queen, thy Love ?

SIDDARTHA. For that sweet sake of Her thou
playest thus,
Fair and false Shadow ! is thy playing vain.
When my hand stays the Wheel of Death and Birth,
Thee too I will deliver from thy curse !
But I am yet a Man, my flesh might yield ;
Fade ye away, fair phantoms of my past !
*(An awful shriek is heard : THE FALSE YASODHARA,
the Nautch-Girls and the outline of Wishramvan melt
away into the mist.)*

THE DEVAS *(invisible chorus from above)*.

We are the voices of the wandering wind
Which moan for rest, and rest can never find,
So many woes we see in many lands,
So many streaming eyes and wringing hands.

*(The mist is gradually blown away by the wind, and
the landscape appears as at the beginning of the Act.)*

MARA. Thou art the victor, Buddh ! Naught
can prevail
Against thy iron will. Well hast thou won
Nirvana's bliss which lies within thy reach !

VOICES OF THE FOREST.
Surely we are lost, we and all creatures !
O Lord and Saviour, pity for our woes !

SIDDARTHA (*touching the Earth with one hand*).
O Mother Earth, I hear, I know, I come !
But will thy creatures learn my Law of Love ?

MARA. Why preach a World where none will
understand ?
Nirvana's bliss is thine. What wilt thou more ?

SIDDARTHA (*to the Earth*). If really it is I by
whom all Life
Will from the Wheel of matter be unbound,
Send forth a sign, so that the World may see !

(*A huge Lotus-Flower emerges slowly from the
ground at the foot of the Bodhi-tree.*)

VOICES OF THE FOREST.
Let thy Great Law be uttered to all Life !

MARA. If really thou art Buddh, let others grope
Lightless ! It is enough that Thou art Thou
Changelessly ; rise, and take the bliss of Gods !

SIDDARTHA (*to MARA*).
Cheat such as love themselves ; I love all Life !
Unto all Life I give my Law of Love !

(The Lotus-Flower unfolds, providing Siddartha with a glorious throne. His Aura appears, dimly at first. Its glow grows more and more vivid, gradually lighting up the forest. Mara, overcome by the boundless Power now working through Siddartha, falls powerless and lifeless on the ground.)

VOICES OF THE FOREST.

This the Dawn the ages waited for !

SIDDARTHA. Many a House of Life
Hath held me—seeking ever Him who wrought
These prisons of the senses, sorrow-fraught ;
Sore was my ceaseless strife !

(SIDDARTHA rises and stands upright on the Lotus-Flower, his left hand pointing to Mara who lies prostrate at his feet, his right hand half-raised, to emphasize his will to teach the World.)

But now
Thou Builder of this Tabernacle—Thou !
I know Thee ! Never shalt Thou build again
These walls of pain !

THE DEVAS *and the* VOICES OF THE FOREST.
Ah ! Blessed Lord ! Oh ! High Deliverer !
Ah ! Lover ! Brother ! Guide ! Lamp of the Law !
We take our refuge in thy Law of Good !
The Dew is on the Lotus ! Rise, Great Sun !

(The first rays of dawn appear.)

The Dewdrop slips into the Shining Sea !

The End.

STAGE-HINTS FOR "THE LIGHT OF ASIA"

The artist called upon to design the scenery and costumes should realize the spirit in which this work has been conceived. Excessive realism (in the sense of anything like a photographic reproduction of nature) would be out of place, as would also be impressionism or any of the later formulæ in pictorial art. It should be borne in mind that my hero is essentially the *mythical* Buddha—differing from the *historical* (of whom, in fact, but little is known) in that the principal episodes of his life seem to have been altered more or less by tradition to make them illustrate some of the great truths embodied in his teaching. But, to the artist, myth is more *real* than history, since it *lives* in the minds of myriads of human beings—whereas the history of the remote ages, if known at all, lies buried in books accessible only to a few. Likewise, Buddha's surroundings are mythical, though formed of elements borrowed from what is usually styled reality, *i.e.*, from the physical plane.

The episodes of Gautama's life should be represented on the stage very much as they were pictured by the Buddhist artists in the age of faith. It is necessary that the painter of the scenery should *see* some of their masterpieces. To those who have not access to them, I may say that they have something in common with the art inspired by mediæval Christianity, improperly called primitive, perhaps because the superficial observer takes for technical

ignorance or lack of perspective what is, in reality, perspective *from a different plane* than the physical. Differences in size and distance are considered unessential to the artist's purpose *as a religious teacher*, and are therefore superseded by a symbolic picturing of spiritual or mental values, which appear to him as *absolute*, and not relative to his position in space, or to a possible illusion of his senses.

Another feature of Buddhist pictures is the perfect harmony of their colouring which makes them appear beautiful even to those who are ignorant of their meaning. A similar harmony of colour could be obtained on the stage by a clever imitation, or rather interpretation, of the costumes and landscape painted by the old masters. This applies more particularly to the Temptation, one of the favourite themes of Buddhist art. Though many of these masterpieces have been achieved by artists belonging to the Mongolian race, it should be borne in mind that Buddha was an Aryan, as were also the other characters presented in this drama. This is of much importance to European actors, who have but little alteration to make to their natural features to assume those of a race akin to our own.

A study of modern Indian painting (particularly that of Abanindranath Tagore and his school) might also prove very inspiring to the artist.

Great importance should be attached to Siddhartha's attitudes, particularly in scenes where they have been consecrated by a long tradition in Buddhist art. In Act I, when Siddhartha, awakening to the fact that he has a mission to fulfil, utters these words ;

My world ! . . . Oh ! World ! I hear, I know, I come !

his left hand should point upwards, towards Heaven, and his right hand downwards, towards the Earth, as in the statue " Buddha as a child " (*Musée Guimet*, Paris). In Act V, Siddartha has four successive attitudes, for which it is easy to find models, since they are the attitudes of the Buddhas of gilded wood which frequently adorn our sitting-rooms. At the beginning of the Act, the Master is seated in the attitude of meditation, with legs crossed and hands closed, joining in the middle of his body, the back of one hand touching that of the other. When addressing the Earth, Siddartha touches the ground with his right hand, his body and left hand remaining in the same position. When uttering the words :

" Many a House of Life hath held me, etc." he raises his right hand. When at last he rises he should copy as closely as possible the attitude of the upright statue of " Buddha teaching the World."

The dancers in the 1st and especially in the 5th act should be fully aware that they are, in the same degree as are the singers, *dramatis personæ* ; not, in any sense, ornamental, but *essential*. The Temptation-scene is one of the most important scenes in the whole drama, showing the Test through which it is made evident to Siddartha that the illusive fears and seductions of the sense-world have lost all hold upon him. Thus he knows himself to be the Buddha, the Enlightened One, who sees beyond the Veil of things. The outer world is made aware of this fact through the glorious radiance of his Aura and the miraculous growth of the Lotus-flower,

To enter into further detail would exceed the scope of these "hints": I hope I have said enough to give an adequate idea of my conception to those who may be called upon to help me in its realization.

F. B.

